Kongo language

Kongo or **Kikongo** is one of the Bantu languages spoken by the Kongo and Ndundu people living in the equatorial forests of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of the Congo and Angola. It is a tonal language. It was spoken by many of those who were taken from the region and sold as slaves in the Americas. For this reason, while Kongo still is spoken in the above-mentioned countries, creolized forms of the language are found in ritual speech of Afro-American religions, especially in Brazil, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic and Haiti. It is also one of the sources of the Gullah language[6] and the Palenquero creole in Colombia. The vast majority of present-day speakers live in Africa. There are roughly seven million native speakers of Kongo, with perhaps two million more who use it as a second language.

Kikongo is the base for a creole used throughout the region: Kituba, also called *Kikongo de l'État* or *Kikongo ya Leta* ("Kongo of the state" in French or Kongo), *Kituba* and *Monokutuba* (also *Munukutuba*). The constitution of the Republic of the Congo uses the name *Kitubà*, and the one of the Democratic Republic of the Congo uses the term *Kikongo*, even if Kituba is used in the administration.

Kongo	
Kikongo	
Native to	DR Congo, Congo, Angola
Native speakers	(ca. 6.5 million cited 1982–2012)[2] 5 million L2 speakers in DRC (perhaps Kituba)
Language family	Niger–Congo • Atlantic–Congo • Volta-Congo • Benue–Congo • Bantoid • Southern Bantoid • Bantu (Zone H) • Kongo languages (H.10) • **Kongo**
Writing system	Latin, Mandombe
Official status	
Official language in	🇨🇩 Democratic Republic of Congo 🇦🇴 Angola 🇨🇬 Republic of Congo
Language codes	
ISO 639-1	kg (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?iso_639_1=kg)
ISO 639-2	kon (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?code_ID=241)
ISO 639-3	kon – inclusive code Individual codes: kng – Koongo ldi – Laari kwy – San Salvador Kongo (South) yom – Yombe[1]
Glottolog	core1256 (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/core1256) Core Kikongo; incl. Kituba & ex-Kongo varieties[3] yomb1244 (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/yomb1244) Yombe[4]
Guthrie code	H.14–16[5]

Contents

Writing

The Kongo language	
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People	baKongo
Language	kiKongo

Map of the area where Kongo and Kituba as the lingua franca are spoken

Writing

At present there is no standard orthography of Kikongo, with a variety in use in written literature, mostly newspapers, pamphlets and a few books.

Kongo was the earliest Bantu language which was committed to writing in Latin characters and had the earliest dictionary of any Bantu language. A catechism was produced under the authority of Diogo Gomes, a Jesuit born in Kongo of Portuguese parents in 1557, but no version of it exists today.

In 1624, Mateus Cardoso, another Portuguese Jesuit, edited and published a Kongo translation of the Portuguese catechism of Marcos Jorge. The preface informs us that the translation was done by Kongo teachers from São Salvador (modern Mbanza Kongo) and was probably partially the work of Félix do Espírito Santo (also a Kongo).[7]

The dictionary was written in about 1648 for the use of Capuchin missionaries and the principal author was Manuel Robredo, a secular priest from Kongo (who became a Capuchin as Francisco de São Salvador). In the back of this dictionary is found a sermon of two pages written only in Kongo. The dictionary has some 10,000 words.

Additional dictionaries were created by French missionaries to the Loango coast in the 1780s, and a word list was published by Bernardo da Canecattim in 1805.

Baptist missionaries who arrived in Kongo in 1879 developed a modern orthography of the language.

W. Holman Bentley's *Dictionary and Grammar of the Kongo Language* was published in 1887. In the preface, Bentley gave credit to Nlemvo, an African, for his assistance, and described "the methods he used to compile the dictionary, which included sorting and correcting 25,000 slips of paper containing words and their definitions."[8] Eventually W. Holman Bentley with the special assistance of João Lemvo produced a complete Christian Bible in 1905.

AVE MARIA, UAFULUKUA
YE NSAMBU, O
MFUMU SE UNA IAKU.
O NGE VANA VEN'AKENTO
NKUA NSAMBU
YO MALAU YE MBONGO A
VUMU KIAKU YEZU.
E SANTA MARIA,
NGU ANDI A NZAMBI,
INTUVINGIL'OIETO
ASUMUKI, OUAU YE MUNA
UTANGU'A
LUFUA LUETO. AMEN.

The Hail Mary in Kikongo.

Linguistic classification

Kikongo belongs to the Bantu language family.

According to Malcolm Guthrie, Kikongo is in the language group H10, the Kongo languages. Other languages in the same group include Bembe (H11). *Ethnologue* 16 counts Ndingi (H14) and Mboka (H15) as dialects of Kongo, though it acknowledges they may be distinct languages.

According to Bastin, Coupez and Man's classification (Tervuren) which is more recent and precise than that of Guthrie on Kikongo, the language has the following dialects:

- Kikongo group H16

    - Southern Kikongo H16a
    - Central Kikongo H16b
    - Yombe (also called Kiyombe) H16c
    - Fiote H16d
    - Western Kikongo H16d
    - Bwende H16e
    - Lari H16f
    - Eastern Kikongo H16g
    - Southeastern Kikongo H16h

Phonology

Consonant phonemes

	Labial		**Coronal**		**Dorsal**
Nasal		*m* /m/		*n* /n/	*ng* /ŋ/
(prenasalized) Plosive	*mp* /ᵐp/	*mb* /ᵐb/	*nt* /ⁿt/	*nd* /ⁿd/	*nk* /ᵑk/
	p /p/	*b* /b/	*t* /t/	*d* /d/	*k* /k/
(prenasalized) Fricative	*mf* /ᵐf/	*mv* /ᵐv/	*ns* /ⁿs/	*nz* /ⁿz/	
	f /f/	*v* /v/	*s* /s/	*z* /z/	
Approximant		*w* /w/		*l* /l/	*y* /j/

Vowel phonemes

	Front	**Back**
High	*i* /i/	*u* /u/
Mid	*e* /e/	*o* /o/
Low	*a* /a/	

There is contrastive vowel length. /m/ and /n/ also have syllabic variants, which contrast with prenasalized consonants.

English words of Kongo origin

- The Southern American English word "goober", meaning peanut, comes from Kongo *nguba*.[9]
- The word "zombie" comes from Kongo nzombie, meaning "dead.". "Nfumu ya nzombie" is "Chief of the dead", or God.
- The word funk, or funky, in American popular music has its origin, some say, in the Kongo word *Lu-fuki*.[10]
- The name of the Cuban dance *mambo* comes from a Bantu word meaning "conversation with the gods".

In addition, the roller coaster Kumba at Busch Gardens Tampa Bay in Tampa, Florida gets its name from the Kongo word for "roar".

Presence in the Americas

Many African slaves transported in the Atlantic slave trade spoke Kongo, and its influence can be seen in many creole languages in the diaspora, such as Palenquero (spoken by descendants of escaped black slaves in Colombia), Habla Congo/Habla Bantu (the liturgical language of the Afro-Cuban Palo religion), Saramaccan language in Suriname and Haitian Creole.

Literature

In 2018, a book written in Kikongo was nominated for the Grand Prix of Literary Associations.[11]

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   Laari (https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/ldi/) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)
   San Salvador Kongo (South) (https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/kwy/) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)
   Yombe (https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/yom/)[1] at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)
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External links

- PanAfrican L10n page on Kongo (https://web.archive.org/web/20070322025256/http://www.panafril10n.org/wikidoc/pmwiki.php/PanAfrLoc/Kongo)
- Bentley, William Holman (1887). *Dictionary and grammar of the Kongo language, as spoken at San Salvador, the ancient capital of the old Kongo empire, West Africa. Appendix* (https://archive.org/details/dictionarygramma00bentuoft). London Baptist Missionary Society. Retrieved 2013-05-23.
- *Congo kiKongo Bible : Genesis* (https://archive.org/details/rosettaproject_kng_gen-3). Westlind UBS. 1992. Retrieved 2013-05-23.
- OLAC resources in and about the Koongo language (http://www.language-archives.org/language/kng)

Kongo learning materials

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- Nkutama a Mvila za Makanda, Imprimerie Mission Catholique Tumba (https://web.archive.org/web/20061103094405/http://www.nekongo.org/akongo/docs/langue_culture/nkutama_mvila_makanda.pdf), (1934) par J. CUVELIER, Vic. Apostlique de Matadi. 56 pages (L'auteur est en réalité Mwene Petelo BOKA, Catechiste redemptoriste à Vungu, originaire de Kionzo.)
- [1] (http://www.omniglot.com/writing/kongo.htm)

This page was last edited on 1 July 2020, at 10:06 (UTC).